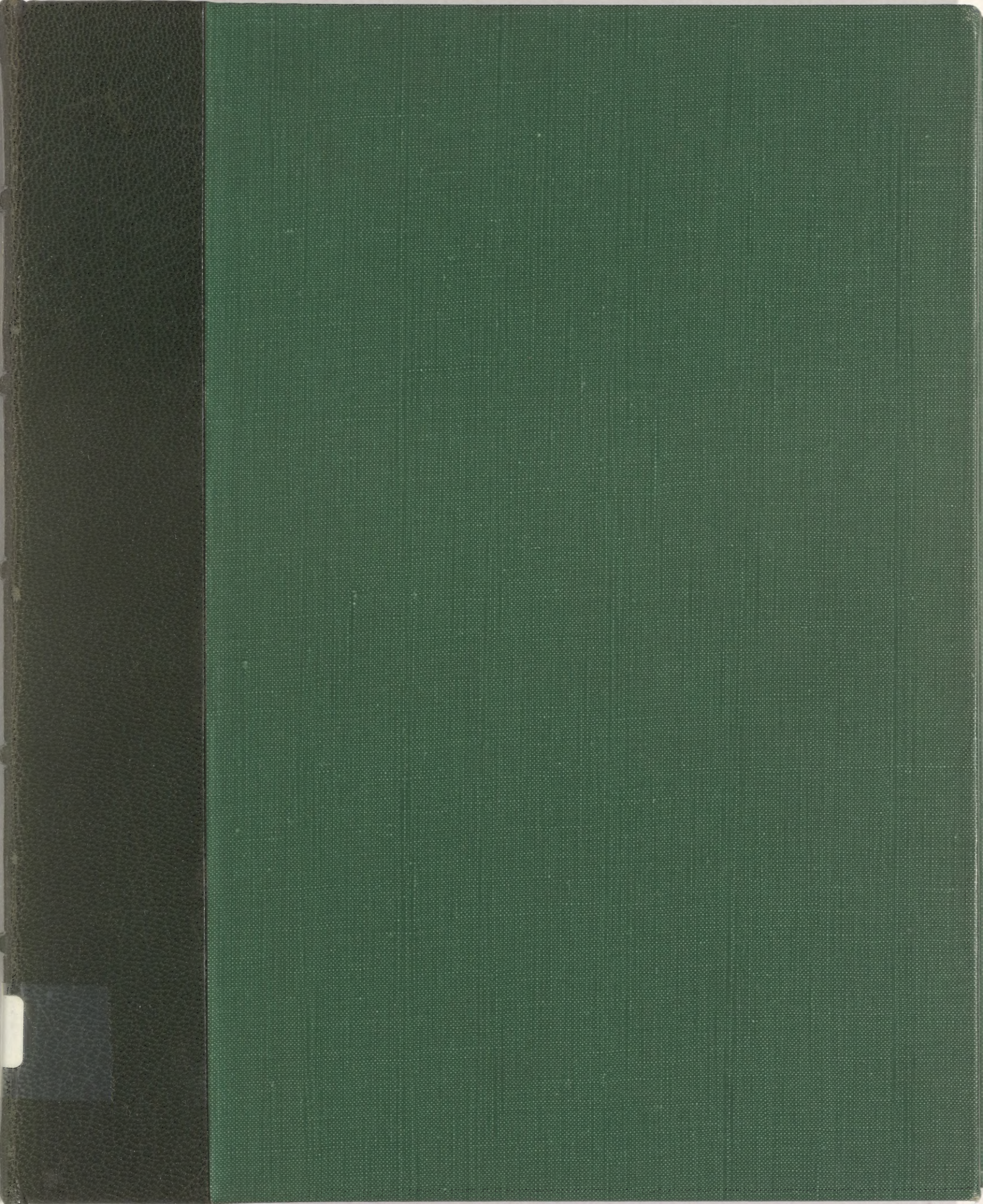
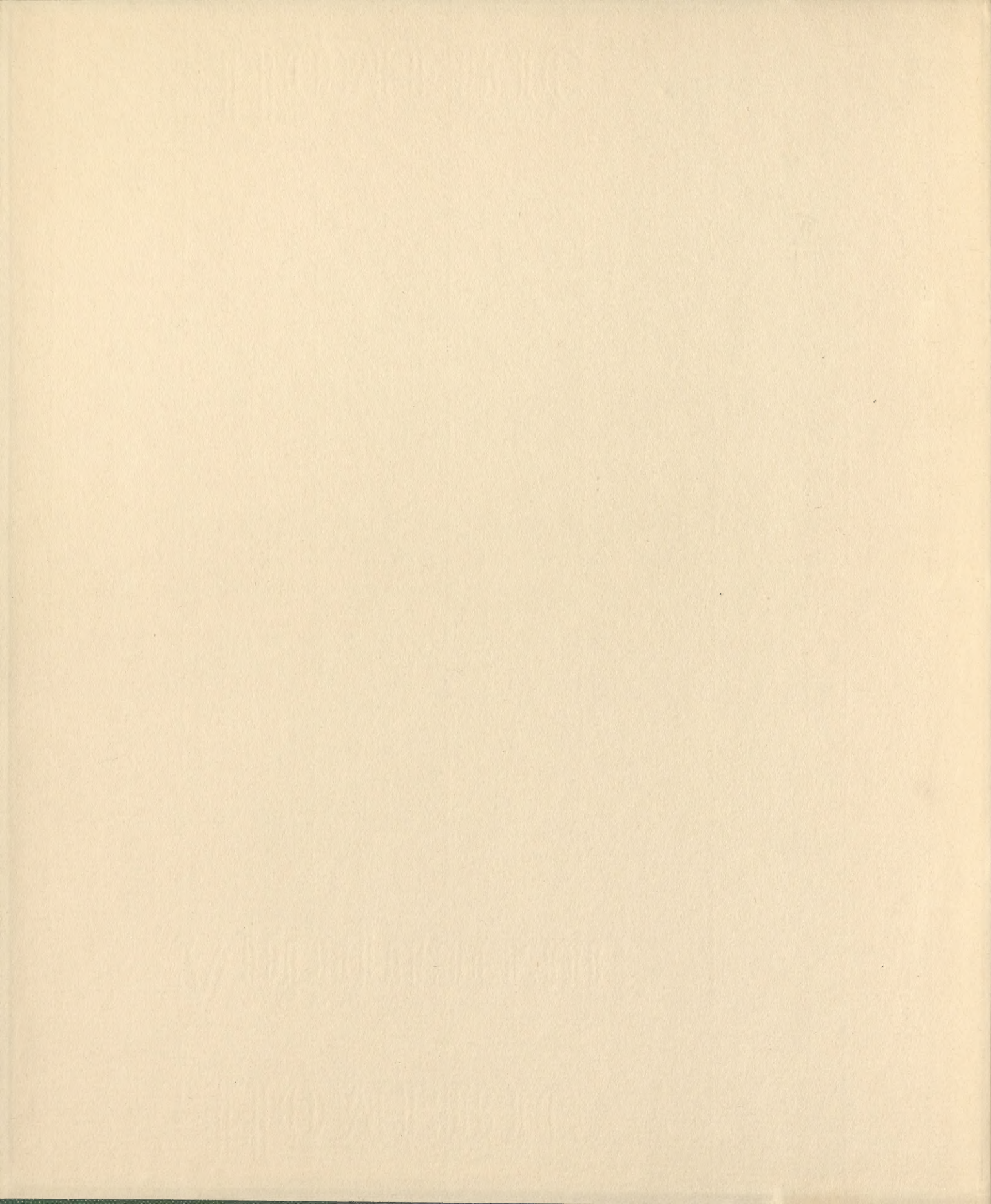
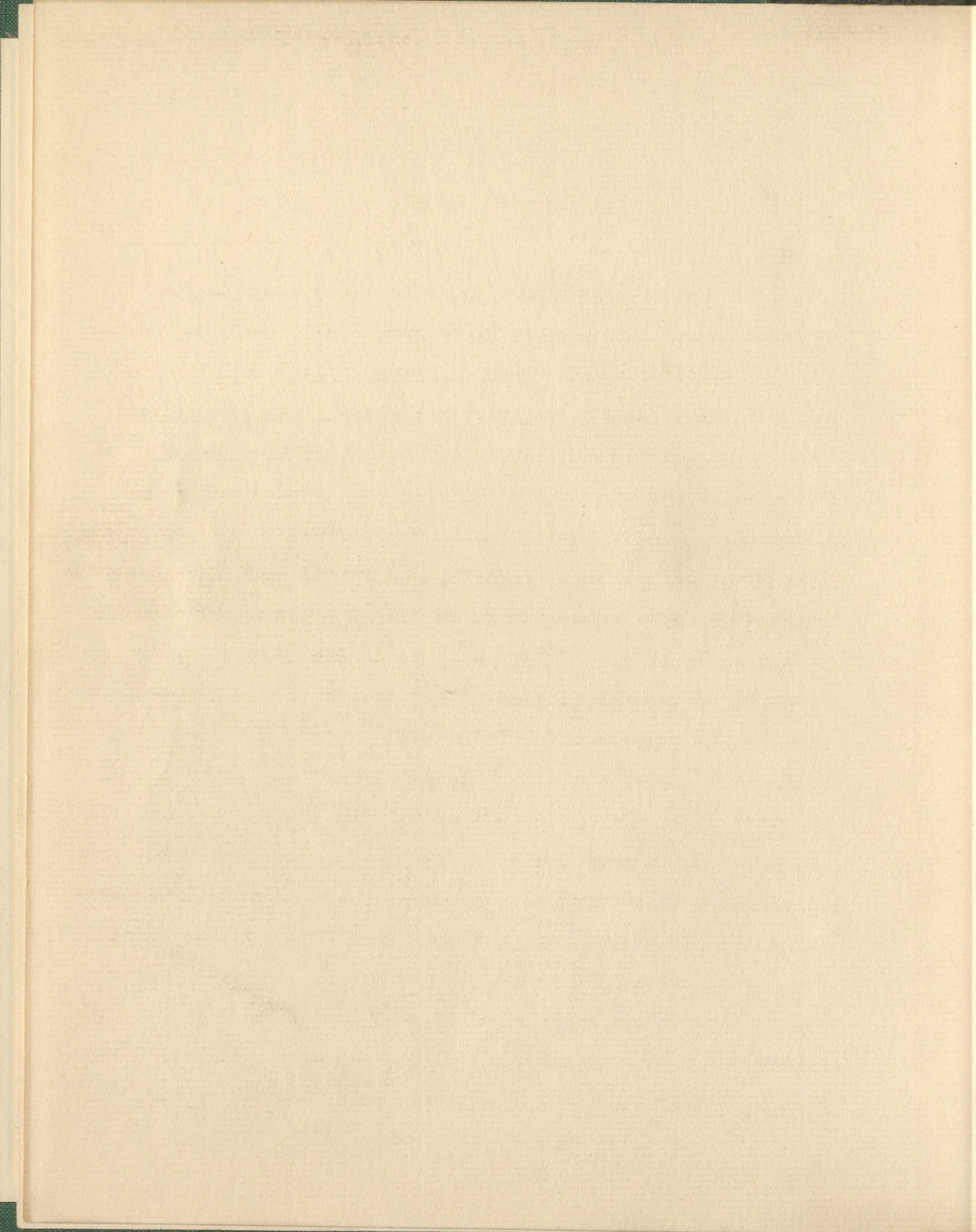






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IVOR GURNEY

by

MARION M. SCOTT



In time to come after the years have assayed our century, songs and poems by Ivor Gurney will still be living, young, beautiful and English. Hitherto only a handful of men and women, mostly artists themselves, have recognized their rare quality and loved them for their loveliness. Fewer still are the people who know Gurney personally, and the public knows him not at all. Therefore it has been thought well that the critical appreciations of his work here gathered together in Music and Letters should be prefaced by a sketch of his early life. After all, it is the artist's life which binds together things of his creating, and neither of them can be quite explicable without the other.

My acquaintance with Gurney began when one day in May 1911 I saw coming towards me walking along a corridor in the Royal College of Music, a figure which even in that place of marked individualities, appeared to me uncommon. For one thing the boy was wearing a thick, dark blue, Severn pilot's coat, which suggested an out-of-door life, rather than the composition lesson with Sir Charles Stanford to which, by the manuscript tucked under his arm, he was clearly bound. But what struck me more was the look of latent force in him, the

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fine head with its profusion of light brown hair (not too well brushed!) and the eyes, which, behind their spectacles, were of the mixed colouring (in Gurney's case hazel, gray, green and agate) which Erasmus once said were regarded by the English as denoting unusual genius. "This", I said to myself, "must be the new composition scholar from Gloucester whom they call Schubert".

A fortnight later the same figure entered my room at the R. G. M. He said he wished to join the R.G.M. Union; he gave his name as Ivor B. Gurney, the address of his diggings in Pulham, and a home address at Gloucester. On being asked what his initial stood for, "Bertie", he replied apologetically. I learnt long afterwards that this was not a diminutive for Herbert, but a surname, his parents having called him after Ivor Bertie Guest, Lord Wimborne, the great man of the Wimborne district, where I. B's father had passed his apprenticeship years.

Gurney was twenty-one when he came to the Royal College of Music, but still seemed very much a boy in his alternate bursts of shyness and self-reliance. His earliest poems were offered to the R. G. M. Union and Magazine with diffidence. Nevertheless he knew, when he composed the "Elizas" (his five Elizabethan Songs) that they were jolly good and he never rested till he made me see them, thereby permanently me by their beauty.

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A fortnight later the same figure entered my room at
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in Exeter and a house address at Gloucester. On being asked
what his initial stood for, "Bobbery", he replied apologetically.
I found long afterwards that this was not a distinctive
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after John Gurney's death, Lord Viscount, the great man of the
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re by their beauty.

From the first, the tremendous hold which Gloucestershire had upon his thoughts and affections was apparent. Filial and affectionate towards his parents, one nevertheless felt that Gloucestershire was his foster mother. Later, when he served in France during the War, he made friends with the French country-folk by instinct. This understanding came about I think because Gurney and Gloucestershire belong to each other in much the same way that French peasants are united to France where the same families have lived on the same land for centuries. There was in him at times a tremendous pride and hawk-like swiftness of temper that suggested some far-off back Norman, or even Roman, strain. It could well be in Gloucestershire, and Gurney is of Gloucester stock on both sides. His father David was the seventh and youngest son of a builder and carpenter at Waissonare; his mother was from Bisley near Stroud. Ivor, their eldest son, was born in Gloucester itself at 3. Green Street on August 28. 1890. He was baptized at All Saints' Church by the Reverend (now Canon) Cheeseman, and the latter became his godfather from the accident that no one else was present except the parents. The event had far-reaching consequences, among them that of Gurney's introduction as a boy to much of the finest English poetry, Canon Cheeseman making him read the poems aloud. Gurney's remarkable sense of word setting and word values may well have been developed by this. At the age of eight

he became a probationer and later a member of the choir of All Saints, going to the Cathedral as a Chorister in 1900. Here he was under Dr. Brewer for music and a good general education was given him at the King's School. I have been told he was a famous solo boy. People flocked to the Cathedral to hear him. It was not alone the beauty of his voice but the deep musical expressiveness of his singing which enchanted them. From 1906 to 1911 he was assistant organist at the Cathedral. Also (since money was an urgent problem) he contrived to hold a succession of Church organist posts, first at Whitminster near Gloucester, then at Hempstead nearer Gloucester, and thirdly at the Mariners' Church at the docks in Gloucester itself. I say 'contrived', because with his invincible independence of thought and action, fixed routine of any sort has always irked him. He felt stifled too by the conservatism of a Cathedral town. The Three Choirs Festivals brought a welcome change, but even here the prevalence of Mendelssohn oppressed him, and he relieved his feelings by attacking the programmes in a series of brilliant letters to (I think) the Gloucester Citizen Journal. Written under the nom de plume of 'Dotted Crotchet' they made a stir, earned the praise of Mr. Ernest Newman, and the righteous wrath of the authorities - especially when the identity of 'Dotted Crotchet' was ~~revealed~~ discovered!

The object of the present work is to present a complete and
correct account of the history of the British Empire, from its
origin to the present time, in a series of volumes, which
shall not only be useful to the student, but also to the
general reader, by giving a clear and concise view of the
progress of the Empire, and the various events which
have shaped its destiny. The work is divided into three
volumes, the first of which contains the history of the
British Empire from its origin to the year 1700, the
second volume contains the history from 1700 to 1789, and
the third volume contains the history from 1789 to the
present time. The work is written in a simple and
clear style, and is intended to be a useful and
interesting book to all who are interested in the
history of the British Empire.

THE HISTORY OF THE BRITISH EMPIRE

Gurney loved books, games and the open air. When only ten, he would read the Preface to the Prayer Book during sermons. He was capital at football, keen on cricket, a daring yachtsman. He passionately enjoyed sailing his little boat the 'Dorothy' on the Severn and friends who sailed with him speak with bated breath of the risks he took. Why he was not drowned many times over, no one knows.

Nor do I know at what age he first read Shakespeare and first heard the music of Beethoven, but they early became master-passions with him. He was in his teens when one day, reading Shakespeare as he 'minded' the shop for his father during lunch-time, the impulse to compose suddenly came to him - and that was that! For years he carried about a copy of Beethoven's G sharp minor string quartet in his pocket.

In 1911 he won an Open Scholarship for Composition and came to the Royal College of Music. This was a great emancipation in some ways for lessons under Stanford, and even more the College itself under Parry gave scope for the whole of the students' gifts and characters. Besides, in their queer way, - Stanford stern and Gurney rebellious - they grew fond of one another, while for Parry, I. B. G. always had a deep affection.

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When war broke out, Gurney, greatly volunteered, was rejected on account of his eyesight, worked through the autumn

term of 1914 at the Royal College, wangled his way into khaki, and by the early months of 1915 was in the Yeomanry, where the other men gave him a very rough time. Happily he soon transferred to the 2/5 Gloucesters, and did a year's training in England before going to France with the battalion, and somehow it will suited him, though he cursed the button-cleaning. A few of the verses in 'Severn and Somme' belong to the months when he was at Chelmsford. Then in May 1916 he went to France and had sixteen months without a leave home to England.

Roughly his itinerary was Laventie Line, Fouquissart, Richebourg then Reserve and Rest - march to Somme in autumn, Grandecourt, Crucifix Corner, (a few miles from Albert) in a Nissen hut, where he spent Christmas, then a short spell in billets at Varennes, followed by a march on to the South Somme, a ghastly time in the trenches at Chaumes, and marching in the devastated region where food failed for days and he grew so weak that at Vermand in a night attack when he saw a German under a tree just about to shoot him, he could barely fling the bomb at the German's arm which would deflect the aim. Gurney just did it, but was shot in the shoulder, got six weeks blessed respite at Rouen and then back to duty.

It was about this time that ~~his~~ the poems he had been writing all the year were ready to be offered to a publisher. Mr. Dunhill gave me an introduction for them to Messrs. Sidgwick and Jackson. I sent in 'Severn and Somme', as the book

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